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AUTHOR Bennett, Jean R.; Ellis, Robert H.
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ABSTRACT

Counseling has an impact on how college students view their problems and most students feel positive toward their counseling experiences. Students and counselors at a rural college completed a questionnaire to evaluate their experiences. Results indicated that both students and counselors agreed on the nature, but not the cause, of their problems. Counseling satisfaction peaked after three to five sessions, the average time span over which most students were seen. The shorter term sessions were more crisis-oriented and diagnostically accurate than the longer term sessions, thus allowing the students to mobilize more quickly in the problem-solving area. The findings suggest that students seen in extended sessions may be less able to reconstruct their ego defenses and may become more dependent on counseling. (JAC)

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# A STUDY TO DETERMINE THE EFFECTS OF COUNSELING ON STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR PROBLEMS

Jean R. Bennett, M.S.W., A.C.S.W.
Counseling Center
State University College
Fredonia, New York

Robert H. Ellis, Ph.D.
Education Department
State University College
Fredonia, New York

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# A Study to Determine the Effects of Counseling on Students' Perceptions of their Problems

A study was conducted to investigate the ways counseling may affect students' attitudes toward not only personal life but also educational goals. Students involved attended a small rural college with a population of approximately 5200 students; a third from an urban area, a third from the local area, and a third from throughout the State.

The Counseling Center is staffed by four counselors; two Ph.D. Counseling Psychologists, one of whom is the Director, one Master's Counselor, and one MSW.

## Statement of the Problem

When the Counseling Center undertook its research task in the fall of 1978, we were concerned with the following questions: Does counseling have an impact on students' view of their problems? Do students come to counseling for personal problems directly affecting educational and vocational problems as such? Do these reasons change following counseling? To what extent do the perceptions of counselors and students match? Do these change with counseling? Finally, is there a relationship between the length of time in counseling and satisfaction with it?

## Method

### Participants

The basic population consisted of students who came to the Counseling Center between July 1978 and June 1979 (466), of that number 86 completed the material.

These students signed a release for confidentiality which stated the purpose of the study and informed them that they would also be receiving a questionnaire following counseling which would be mailed to them in a plain envelope.

### Procedure

The data was collected prior to the first interview by presenting to the student as he appeared to the secretary, a Counseling Services Assessment Blank (Hurst and Weigel, 1968) which included age, sex, class, academic major, reasons for coming to counseling, i.e. vocational, personal or educational and causes for this problem, such as lack of information about self, lack of information about the environment, conflict within self, conflict with others, and lack of skills.

The counselor filled out the same questionnaire after the first interview with the student.

After termination of the sessions or at the end of the semester, the assessment questionnaire was sent to the student with a stamped envelope plus two follow-up letters if indicated. The post-questionnaire included a rating scale of 1 indicating not at all, to 5, indicating very much and 6, not applicable on the following reactions:

I was able to (1) gain information about myself; (2) about the environment; (3) to resolve conflict within myself; (4) to resolve conflict with others; (5) to remedy my lack of skills; (6) I found the tests I took to be; (7) I felt the information I disclosed to my counselors would be; (8) I felt information I disclosed in group would be; (9) my overall individual counseling experience was; (10) my overall group experience was; (11) my individual counselor was; (12) my group counselor was; (13) I found other group members to be; (14) I felt the physical facilities were; (15) I saw my coming to counseling as demonstrating; (16) my overall counseling experience was.

The counselor filled out the same questionnaire at the end of the sessions as he/she had at the first session plus the number of sessions with the student.

An obscan sheet was used to code the data collected which was then analyzed by SPSS computer program. The independent variables, age, sex, number of sessions, and identification of counselor were analyzed with reasons for counseling, causes and ratings of experience.

## Results

Students who stated their problem was personal were also seen by the counselor as having personal problems. Students who indicated their problem was vocational were seen by the counselor as having personal problems which affected this area,

particularly conflict with self. Students who indicated their problem was educational, counselors indicated a specific cause as lack of skills and information regarding self. Conflict with others was closely allied with conflict with self.

Males came to counseling more frequently with vocational and personal problems than educational and rated the specific cause of their problems as lack of information regarding the environment. Females came to counseling with personal problems more frequently than with vocational or educational problems and rated their specific cause as conflict with self.

Male counselors saw more male students and female counselors more female students.

Students were able to gain more information about themselves as the counseling sessions increased. Coming for counseling as a measure of strength reached a peak at the 3-5 session interval and decreased thereafter. Students did not seem to remedy lack of skills with extended sessions. Test-taking remained constant within 3-5 sessions. These students are not seen for extended sessions. Confidentiality in individual and group counseling was positive for both sexes as was the total overall counseling experience.

## Discussion

Both sexes indicated they were satisfied with their counseling experience and were able to gain the information they were seeking, except for remedying lack of skills. Does this indicate that the special programs, e.g. peer advising and study

skills meet this need better or are these students poor academic risks? If students are equating their educational and vocational problems with lack of knowledge and skill, we may need to examine these needs in proposing programs. We have trained and supervised volunteers for a peer advising program to help students with selection of courses. We have also conducted study skills seminars regularly.

It would seem that the interval of 3-5 sessions provides the most satisfaction. Our reports indicate this is the average for all the counselors. Meeting the crisis and solving the problem calls for skill in diagnosis and technique, an area in which our staff appears to be competent.

There is a tendency for students to select same gender counselors. This should be noted in staff appointments. We have two men and two women.

Upon examining the causes of the problem as seen by counselor and student at the beginning of counseling, students were aware that they lacked information regarding themselves whereas counselors might see this cause slanted more toward lack of information regarding the environment. Perhaps this is more of a question of semantics as students are attempting to adjust to the college community and are feeling personally inadequate.

It is interesting to note that students who come for vocational counseling see the cause as conflict with self.

Counselors are often aware that the request for vocational help is a means of access to counseling and therefore less threatening although the real motivation may be for personal assistance.

There seems to be general agreement between counselors and students on the definition of the problem, personal, educational, or vocational and its causes both initially and finally. Students with educational problems seemed to be more aware of personal needs at the end of counseling which may indicate the ability of the counselor to treat all aspects of the individual.

We have noted that females more frequently came to counseling with personal problems than males. We might reflect on the cultural aspects of this statement. Our society condones the strong male who solves his own problems and accepts the female as the one who is in need of personal support.

## Conclusion

In conclusion it seems that counseling does have an impact on how students view their problems. In most instances, students felt they were strengthened by the experience.

The perceptions of counselor and student match as to the nature of the problem. The changes occur in the specific causes of the problem. After personal counseling, particularly, the student tends to view the problem more like the counselor which he/she indicates as a positive experience.

Satisfaction in counseling reaches a peak at the 3-5 level of sessions which is the average time most students are seen. If sessions are extended, there tends to be less satisfaction. The shorter term is probably more crisis-oriented and more diagnostically accurate allowing the student to mobilize more quickly in the problem solving area. The student seen in extended sessions may be less able to reconstruct his ego defenses and thus may become more dependent on the counseling experience.

## References

Hurst, J. C. & Weigel, R. G. Counseling Services Assessment Blank (Rocky Mountain Behavioral Science Institute, Inc., Colorado, 1968).

## COUNSELING SERVICES ASSESSMENT BLANK



Please answer all the following questions in terms of both the individual and group counseling you received. Then return the questionnaire in the envelope provided.

Do not mark in these boxes

Name _____ Student Number [ | | | | | | | | | ]

[ | ] 1. Age_____

[ ] 2. Sex_____

[ ] 3. Marital Status: Single_____ Married_____ Divorced_____ Separated_____ Widowed_____

[ ] 4. Class: Fresh_____ Soph_____ Junior_____ Senior_____ Grad_____ Other (Specify)_____

[ | ] 5. Academic Major: _____

[ | ] 6. How many counseling sessions did you attend

[ | ] a. individual sessions _____ b. group sessions _____

7. For what reason(s) did you come to counseling? Would you please rank the reasons that apply in order of their importance to you (i.e. "1", "2", and "3").

[ ] _____A vocational concern (career choice or planning for the future).

[ ] _____A personal concern (adjustments concerning behaviors, attitudes and feelings.)

[ ] _____An educational concern (lack of academic skill or information, e.g. reading, study skills, university requirements and procedures, etc.)

8. The reasons may have arisen from a variety of causes. Please rank which causes you feel were applicable in order of their importance to you (i.e. "1", "2", "3", "4", and "5".)

[ ] _____Lack of information about yourself (e.g. your abilities, behaviors, interests, personality, etc.)

[ ] _____Lack of information about your environment (e.g. information about education, occupations, other individuals or situations.)

[ ] _____Conflict within yourself (e.g. your feelings, goals, interests, or behaviors that are incompatible with each other.)

[ ] _____Conflict with others (e.g. your feelings, goals, interests, or behaviors that are incompatible with those of people who are most important to you.)

[ ] _____Lack of skill (e.g. difficulty in reading, study, work, social situations, etc.)

Below we would like you to rank different aspects of your counseling by placing a mark in one of the areas on each scale that most nearly describes your reaction to the question. Answer all questions in terms of both the group and individual counseling YOU received.

| | | Not at all | Very much | Not applicable to me |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| [ ] | 9. I was able to gain information about myself (e.g. my abilities, behaviors, interests, personality, etc.) | \| \| \| \| \| \| | | [ ] |
| [ ] | 10. I was able to gain needed information about the environment (e.g. information about education, occupations, other individuals or situations, etc.) | \| \| \| \| \| \| | | [ ] |
| [ ] | 11. I was able to resolve conflict within myself (e.g. my feelings, goals, interests, or behaviors that were incompatible with each other.) | \| \| \| \| \| \| | | [ ] |
| [ ] | 12. I was able to resolve conflict with others (e.g. my feelings, goals, interests or behaviors that were incompatible with those of people who are most important to me.) | \| \| \| \| \| \| | | [ ] |
| [ ] | 13. I was able to remedy my lack of skill (e.g difficulty in reading, study, work, social situations, etc.) | \| \| \| \| \| \| | | [ ] |

By James C. Hurst, Ph.D. and Richard G. Weigel, Ph.D.
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Answer all questions in terms of the individual or group counseling YOU received.

Do not mark in these boxes

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Of no help at all ... Very helpful | Not applicable to me |
| ☐ 14. | I found the tests I took to be | | ☐ |
| | | Blabbed all over campus ... Strictly confidential | |
| ☐ 15. | I felt that the information I disclosed to my counselor(s) would be | | |
| ☐ 16. | I felt that the information I disclosed in the group would be | | ☐ |
| | | Extremely negative ... Extremely positive | |
| ☐ 17. | How would you rate your overall INDIVIDUAL counseling experience | | ☐ |
| ☐ 18. | How would you rate your overall GROUP counseling experience | | ☐ |
| | | Of no help at all ... Very helpful | |
| ☐ 19. | I found my INDIVIDUAL counselor(s) to be | | ☐ |
| ☐ 20. | I found my GROUP counselor(s) to be | | ☐ |
| ☐ 21. | I found the other group members to be | | ☐ |
| | | Detrimental to counseling ... Conducive to counseling | |
| ☐ 22. | I felt the physical facilities of the counseling operation were: | | |
| | | Weakness and inadequacy ... Strength and adequacy | |
| ☐ 23. | I saw my coming for counseling as demonstrating | | |
| | | Extremely negative ... Extremely positive | |
| ☐ 24. | How would you rate your total overall counseling experience? | | |

25. Which of the following concerns do YOU see the counseling operation on this campus emphasizing (that is, what kinds of concerns are dealt with primarily). Please rank the ones you feel are applicable (i.e. "1", "2", "3").

☐ _____Vocational (career choice or planning for the future).

☐ _____Personal (adjustments concerning behaviors, attitudes and feelings).

☐ _____Educational (lack of academic skill or information, e.g. reading, study skills, university requirements and procedures, etc.)

☐☐ 26. What other service or office on this campus do you feel is most similar to the counseling operation.

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27. Is there anything else you would like to tell us?